

EUGENICS AND THE DECLINE IN POPULATION

By D. CARADOG JONES

THERE is an acid test which the eugenist can apply to discover whether any measure concerned with population is to be judged good or bad. He asks whether it is likely to ensure that the best types of infants are born, whether it helps these types to survive, and whether it encourages them later in life to become parents themselves. At first sight we seem to have here three separate ends in view, but in reality they are so intimately related that, if we succeed in taking measures to secure the third, we shall be well on our way to gaining the other two. By giving every possible encouragement to the best types in the community to become parents, we shall be tackling the problem where it ought to be tackled, at its source. The best human material is most likely to be produced from the best stock and—if “best” be all-embracing, applying to body as well as mind and soul, to adopt an old-fashioned but convenient division—the offspring from healthy stock is most likely to have a high survival rate.

Readers of *The Struggle for Population** may be surprised to find no clear reference in it to eugenic principles, seeing that the book has been prepared under the auspices of the *Eugenics Society*. Presumably the explanation is that this aspect of the subject is reserved for future discussion, and the author has advisedly confined himself at present to his terms of reference, as defined for him by the Population Investigation Committee. As the first-fruit of the Committee's activities he has produced a most valuable piece of work, and he is to be congratulated on having summarised in small space and in so readable a form the main facts relating to the population position in five of the chief countries of Europe.

The concluding chapter in the book sums up the position in the first sentence: “Now that people are beginning to realize the danger of the present situation we may, within the next few years, see most of the governments of Europe attempting, in their turn, to stimulate the birth-rate. The question that arises is, what kind of action is likely to have such a result?” The danger to which the author alludes, of course, is the coming decline in population, progressive in its rapidity, which threatens most European countries. Analysis of the anticipated trend of the age-distribution of the population of England and Wales indicates that the responsibility for the production of goods and supply of services will rest on the shoulders of a relatively much smaller proportion of able-bodied persons; this in turn will mean a higher rate of taxation per head. Moreover, the writer goes on to suggest that the effect of recurrent trade cycles will be much more severe; the constructional industries in particular will suffer badly. As the market shrinks, we may have to return to small-scale methods of production and the whole costs structure of industry may be radically altered; in that event a serious rise in prices and fall in the standard of life may result for everybody. It was high time, therefore, that an examination should be made of the steps being taken by countries other than our own to avert the impending disaster, if we are to profit by their experience. Unfortunately, however, the time has been too short for the schemes adopted by them to be fairly and fully tested. Much of the legislation enacted only came into force within the last year or two and it is obviously too soon to base any certain conclusions upon such slender evidence. This being so, it would be well worth while for the Committee to ask Mr. Glass to keep his figures up to date and to report upon the

* Glass, D. V., *The Struggle for Population*. London, 1936. Oxford University Press. Pp. 148. Price 7s. 6d.

position again after the lapse of a reasonable interval.

The present volume ought to be read in conjunction with Professor Carr-Saunders' study of *World Population*,* just published by the Oxford University Press. The problem that confronts us can then be seen in a larger setting and in its full complexity. Mr. Glass has conducted a careful and detailed enquiry into the effect of the efforts made in Germany, Italy, France and Belgium to stimulate the birth-rate, and one chapter in Professor Carr-Saunders' book is devoted to a re-statement of the evidence and the conclusions which one can venture to derive from it. Cautious as both writers have been, the present reviewer is disposed to be still more hesitant in deciding whether or not the results of most of these efforts are likely to remain as negligible as they appear to be up to the present.

It is unnecessary to cover the same ground again, but particular attention may justifiably be drawn here to two important considerations :

1. The remarkable variety, and yet at the same time lack of originality, in the schemes devised in different countries for the promotion of marriage and the increase of fertility ;
2. The no less surprising fact that attacks upon the population problem have been directed almost entirely to the quantitative aspect alone.

In Italy there is a tax on bachelors, while marriage and birth premiums are offered in some of its northern cities with special prizes for exceptionally large families. In Germany loans free of interest are given to couples who contemplate marriage but cannot afford to furnish a home, and part of the loan becomes a gift on the birth of each child. Both countries discriminate in their taxation against the childless and in favour of the larger families. In certain areas preference is given to the heads of large families in the allocation of employment and housing accommodation and in social

services. The laws against the practice of abortion have been tightened and the open advocacy of birth-control has been made a punishable offence in France, Belgium and Italy, though not yet in Germany. Finally, family allowances and maternity and child welfare services each play a part in the formation of the larger-family ideal.

This list does not exhaust the devices adopted to increase the birth-rate, but how familiar they sound and how conspicuously absent is any attempt at eugenic selection! With few exceptions it would appear that all who belong to the working or middle-classes of the population receive equal encouragement to beget children and all who respond are equally applauded. A reservation must be made in the case of Germany, where it is true that beneficiaries as a rule have to satisfy certain medical as well as racial requirements. Applicants for marriage loans, for instance, must be of "Aryan" extraction and "free from inheritable mental or physical defects, infectious diseases, or other illnesses threatening their life and appearing to prevent their marriage from being in the interest of the community." Also, these loans were designed to reduce unemployment by taking women out of industry ; accordingly they are granted only if the women concerned have been in employment for at least nine months in the last two years or if they are replaced by domestic servants when they have been engaged in housework. In so far as women in fairly regular work and free of inheritable defect are superior types we have here an example of a strictly eugenic principle introduced which deserves to be followed. When family allowances are paid in respect of older children who remain in school beyond the normal leaving age, a similar principle is at work in a small way, because parents who can appreciate the advantages of further education may as a general rule be judged to belong to types which deserve to be encouraged to bring more children into the world. At the same time it must be added that it is extremely doubtful whether in practice family allowances have had any substantial effect upon the birth-rate. This

* Carr-Saunders, A. M., *World Population*. Oxford, 1936. The Clarendon Press. Pp. xv+336. Price 12s. 6d.

perhaps is not surprising in view of the fact that the amount of the allowance is usually quite inadequate to cover the extra expense involved in bringing up a child. The conclusion to which Mr. Glass comes, after an impartial examination of the evidence, is that the most that can be said of them is that they may have prevented a still sharper decline in fertility.

If other countries fail, by such methods as they are trying, to reverse the impending trend of population, it will be either because those methods are wrongly conceived or because they are not sufficiently drastic. The present writer is inclined to think that there is truth in both these views. It may be possible to persuade some people to marry and become parents by offering financial inducements on a large enough scale, but the danger is that in the main the wrong kind of people will be open to such persuasion. That is not to say that the provision of marriage loans and family allowances and tax discrimination in favour of large families are wrong in principle. It is right that the income-tax burden should be eased, for example, to the man with heavy family responsibilities, but such assistance is unlikely to be the decisive factor in determining whether parents of the best type elect to have more or fewer children. To such parents the appeal must be put on a higher plane. There may indeed be something in Dr. Burgdörfer's claim, at the International Population Conference in Berlin last year, that the decisive factor in Germany has been "the new outlook brought about by the National Socialist revolution, the fundamental transformation of the political and moral (*geistigen*) atmosphere . . . in short, the return of confidence on the part of the

people in the political and economic government of the nation."

We come back, therefore, to the point where we started. It is not enough to aim at the mass production of human beings, for, assuming we succeed, we shall not be satisfied. The best results are never produced by such methods. In a fine passage from a chapter on "The Small Family Problem"—a chapter that deserves to be widely read and pondered—Professor Carr-Saunders has put his anger unerringly upon one of the root causes of the present situation, and this brief article may fittingly end with the following quotation:* "Upon attitude to marriage depends the end to which it is directed. No institution has been so degraded and vulgarized as marriage; it would almost seem as though all the artifices known to a sensational press and to a commercialized literature have been employed to emphasize every aspect of marriage except the duties which it imposes and the opportunities of self-discipline which it offers. What sort of guidance have young people to-day when they approach the age of marriage? It is as certain as anything can be that, where families are voluntary, a community, in which marriage is regarded as it is to-day in western civilization, will die out. For it is held up to be no more than a mode of self-gratification. Those who are concerned about the small family problem should address themselves earnestly to a reform of the outlook upon marriage. If this outlook is changed, the parental instinct may grow stronger and the power of attraction, exercised by superficial and short-run satisfactions, may grow less."

* *World Population*, p. 256.